# NIGERIA

## Recent discovery of prehistoric sites in the Ajibode area of Ibadan, Nigeria: a preliminary report

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### Introduction

In West Africa, it is commonly believed that the high rain forest zone was too difficult to exploit by humans before the advent of iron. Excavations at Iwo Eleru (Shaw 1984) showed that the rain forest of southern Nigeria was inhabited during the Later Stone Age (LSA) as well as by ground axe producing people. Since then, several LSA sites have been excavated and reported in Nigeria as well as in other parts of West Africa. But considerable confusion surrounds the West African stone age sequence because much of our information is based on undated collections from disturbed contexts or from surface exposures. Several sites have been reported such as Cap Vert (Senegal), southwestern Mali and central Guinea, as well as from the Jos Plateau in Nigeria. But no undisturbed assemblage has been excavated anywhere in West Africa (Soper 1965). Keeping this in mind, and with the aim of finding prehistoric settlements, a systematic reconnaissance was conducted on the Yamuje River. The present paper covers the survey carried out by the author in the Ajibode area of Ibadan in Oyo State, Nigeria from January to March 1992 as well as in January 1993.

Archaeological investigations in the Ajibode area were started in 1988 by the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. According to ethnographic information, there were 17 historical settlements before the University of Ibadan acquired the area in 1985 for agricultural experiments. Some of those sites were used as a field school for archaeology students. As a coordinator of the field school, the author had the opportunity to study the topography of the area, as well as to survey for prehistoric sites.

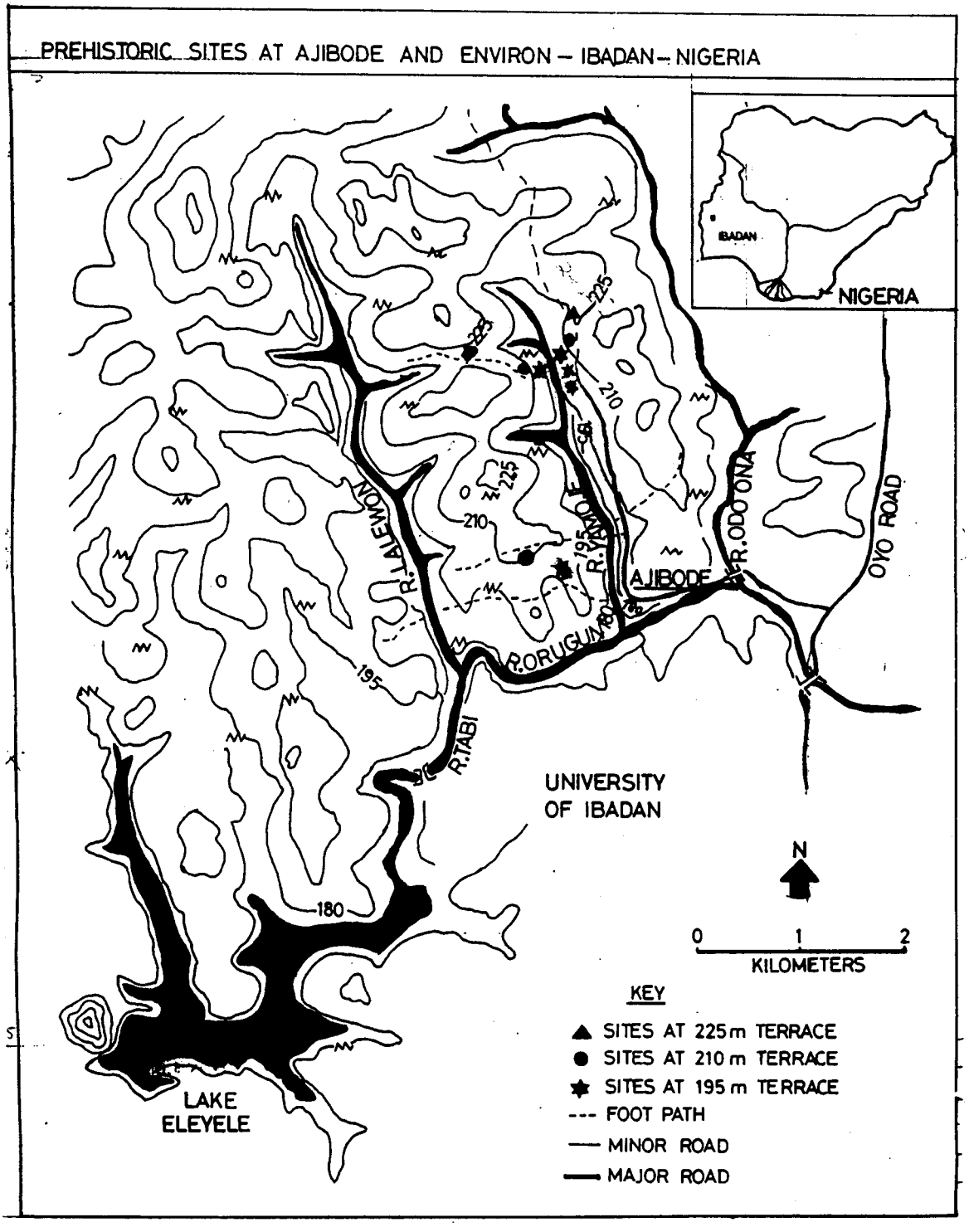
### Topography

The area is located in the southwest region of Nigeria around longitude 7°N and latitude 4°E at an elevation of about 235.2 m above sea level. Ibadan lies wholly within the high forest zone and there is generally high rainfall between April and October, averaging 122 cm per year. The area lies in the humid and subhumid tropics (Udo 1970:30). The area around Ajibode has undulating plains with some rolling landscape. The unevenness of the land surface is punctuated by pediment plains, streams, rivers, well incised valleys forming trellis patterns, ridges and flat table lands. In this area are three rivers, the Lalewan, Yamuje and Odoana which flows from north to south down into the Orogun river. Further down stream, the same river is called Tabi, and enters into Lake Eleyele (Figure 1). The main river flows year round, but there is a marked seasonal variation in its volume. In dry seasons, it may be reduced to a series of pools maintained by sub-surface flow for a number of weeks or months. Different terraces have been formed by the river over time, at heights of 195, 210 and 225 m. The present flood level of the river is 180 m above sea level.

### Vegetation and Geology

The Ajibode area is located within the tropical rain forest vegetation area which has now been turned into a derived savanna as a result of persistent human activities such as farming, bush burning, and so on. Vegetation is characterized by *Eupatorium oderatum*, *Cassia* species, *Cola gingantea*, Alfeeia African, *Anogaressius* species, Parinal *Curate*, *Butyrosperium*, *Burkea africana*, *Lophira lanceolata*, and other introduced plant varieties (Keay 1956:13-18). In the marshy areas, there is gallery forest which includes bamboo, weeds, sugar cane, banana and other plants. Many economically important trees are also found: oil palm (*Elaieus guinensis*), kola nut (*Colanitida* and *Cola acuminita*), baobab (*Adasonia digitata*), locust beans and cultivated food crops like yams (*Discorea*), cassava (*Manni hot esculenta*), cocoyam *Cola casia esculenta*), maize (*Zea mays*), and pawpaw (*Carica papaya*) (Moorman et.al. 1970

**Figure 1: Prehistoric site at Ajibode and environ, Ibadan, Nigeria**



and personal observations). Morover, there are varieties of leafy vegetavles, Akoko trees, spear grass (*Imerata cylindrica*), goat weeds (*Agertum conyzoids*) and epiphytes and other woody climbers such as *Adenia cissam doidses* and *Alchorenia cordifolia*. The rocks of this region are generally igneous and metamorphic. They include feldspar, gneiss, granite, dolerite quartz, schist, and quartzites (Moss 1963:150). Massive inselbergs are found on the right bank of the Odoana river and to the east of Ajibode Secondary School. Most of these rocks are mechanically weathered, and material derived from them forms fertile soil. Lateritic deposits observed in cuttings may date to a dry phase between 20,000 and 12,000 years ago (Jeje 1980:67).

## Reconnaissance

In January 1992, the author began a survey for prehistoric sites, focusing on the Yamuje river. All sites were plotted using a 1:50,000 survey map. A distance of up to 40 m was explored inland on both banks of the river. Later, the survey expanded to higher levels. Sites were identified by heavy surface concentrations of artifacts, as well as seeing artifacts in cuttings. Sites were divided into 10 $m^2$ units, and then a random collection of artifacts were collected from each. Sites were named after the owners of the farms where material was collected: Ajibode Umaru's farm (AJB UMF), Sule's farm (AJB SUF), Lawan's farm (AJB LWF), Babbani site (AJB BAB), Students' Farm I (AJB STF-I), Students' Farm II (AJB STF-II), Majogba-I (AJB MJB-I) and Majogba-II (AJB MJB-II).

Umaru's Farm (AJB UMF) site is located 35 m from the Yamuje river on the left bank. It covered an area of about 20 by 30 m. The area is heavily farmed, and in some parts gullies have exposed lateritic remains with artifacts embedded in them. From top to bottom, three cuttings showed layers of sand, stone lined sand, and lateritic deposits with artifacts. Artifacts collected included unifacial and bifacial handaxes and triangular points. Made on flakes and cores, scraper types were both side and round. Cores included discoids and angular, cylindrical cores with single and double sides. The assemblage also included core chopping tools made on pebbles. Hammerstones were spherical and cylindrical, and a ground, polished stone axe was also recovered. Made on quartzite and quartz, most artifacts are small, with deep and large flake scars, and irregular jagged working edges. Many were patinated and fresh, while some were rolled.

Sule's Farm site (AJB SUF) is located 60 m from the river on the left bank, at a higher level than AJB UMF. Artifacts were distributed over an area of 40 m by 10 m, paralleling the river. They varied in size; large pick-like tools, choppers, and chopper-like pieces on large thick flakes, as well as scrapers and knives on large flakes. Few cores were found, but those present included spheroid and polyhedral forms. Roughouts of celts or cleaver-like tools of granite were also found. The rest of the artifacts were made from quartzite and quartz. Larger tools were found at higher elevations than smaller ones.

Lawan's farm (AJB LWF) site is located on the left bank of the Yamuje river, 120 m from the water, and occupied an area of 40 m by 30 m. Artifacts collected are mostly heavy duty tools which are rough, crude, large and heavy. They were minimally trimmed. Types included pick, cleaver and knife forms, and no cores were found. Most were made of granite and quartzite.

The Babbani site (AJB BAB) is found between the historical site of Babbani and the river, 30 m inland on the left bank. Artifacts of quartz and quartzite were collected. Tool types included unifacial and bifacial choppers, roughouts of handaxes, and core and flake scrapers (round and side scrapers), as well as hammerstones.

Students' Farm site-I (AJB STF-I) is on a farm used by students of the University of Ibadan for agricultural experiments. It lies 35 m inland on the left bank of the Yamuje river, on the southern side of the Sode road. An artifact concentration of 30 m by 20 m can be seen.The farm has not been ploughed heavily, so the deposits are not much disturbed. Artifacts vary in size. The smaller ones were predominanly made of quartz of variable quality, and include scrapers (side and end). Bigger tools are unifacial and bifacial choppers, proto-handaxes and core and flake scrapers. Cores are angular, discoidal, spheroidal and cylindrical with single or double platforms. One ground and polished basalt axe, heavily patinated, was also collected.

The second Students' Farm site (AJB STF-II) is another farm used for agricultural experiments. It is situated on the right bank of the river on gently sloping land. A concentration measuring 60 by 20 m of artifacts was recorded. Along the Sode road, artifacts were also seen embedded in exposed lateritic deposits, and include core and flake tools such as points, choppers, scrapers, knives, cores and hammerstones. Choppers are unifacial and bifacial, and are made on blocks with heavy platforms. Other tool types include scrapers, side scrapers, block core side scrapers and knives. Cores are spherical, discoidal, disc, and cylindrical with single and double platforms. Hammerstones are quartzite, and vary in size. Two polished axes were also recovered.

## Conclusions

The present flood plain of the Yamuje river is at 180 m elevation. Sites found at 195 m include AJB UMF, AJB BAB and AJB STF I on the left bank, and AJB STF II on the right. This level forms the youngest river terrace. Sites like AJB SUF on the left bank and Majogba-I on the right are located on a second terrace at 110 m elevation. AJB LWF and Majogba-II are at 210 m on the third and highest terrace (Table 1). Artifacts in all sites are made primarily of quartzite, quartz and granite, which is locally available. Quartz comes from veins in dolerite outcrops. The quartzite had a lot of impurities, and many artifacts were left unfiniahed or are of irregular shape. Quartz is of variable quality, and some well made tools were manufactured on the better pieces of raw material.

These sites may help establish a prehistoric sequence for the Ibadan area. In the second phase of this project, which lasted from December 17, 1993 to March 18, 1994, further reconnaissance was conducted, and more sites were located. The minimum and maximum flood levels of the river were recorded, and this suggests that the area was occupied when water levels were low. Three undisturbed spots were selected for test excava-

**Table 1: Sites and artifact assemblages of the Ajibode area, Ibadan, Nigeria**

| Terrace | Contour | Site | Artifact Assemblage | Material | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T 1 | 225 m | AJB LWF<br>AJB MJB -II | Trihedrals, polyhedrals picks, crude core tools, points, knives, minimally worked pebbles; cores, hammerstones | quartz, quartzite granite | Crude, rough, large and heavy tools, mimimal flaking. Could be Early Stone Age/Lower Palaeolithic |
| T 2 | 210 m | AJB SUF<br>AJB MJB -II | Picks, choppers, and chopper pieces on large flakes; proto handaxes and cleavers, knives and scrapers; celt; large blade like pieces and hammerstones | quartz, quartzite granite | More controlled technique, but still rough. Mix of big and small core and flake tools. Of interest for future study |
| T 3 | 195 m | AJB UMF<br>AJB BAB<br>AJB STF I<br>AJB STF II | unifacial and bifacial chopper/chopping tools, scrapers on flakes and cores; handaxes and proto-handaxes; unifacial and bifacial; hammerstones, anvils and ground stone axes | quartz, quarzite | Controlled shaping; more fine materials used; discoidal and disc cores; possibly Middle Stone Age |

tions, one on each terrace, and material collected is being analyzed. It is clear that the Ajibode area was intensively occupied throughout prehistoric and historic times, and future work should help establish a prehistoric cultural sequence for this region of West Africa.

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